

**Marriages among the poorer classes of Chinese in Sarawak.**

At the outset it must be said that the Chinese marriage ceremonies, of the Hakka and Kay nations in Sarawak will be very much the same as those in China ; but the Chinese here in Sarawak, being very much mixed up with other nationalities, it is quite probable that they have taken over some of the rites of other nations indigenous to Sarawak. It is for this reason that the writer publishes the following article, which will be divided under three headings, namely : Courtship—The Engagement—The Marriage feast.

**COURTSHIP.**

As in every business transaction, so also for finding a future wife, the Chinese must have a go-between or middle-man (*moi nün*). Suppose a young man, being independent of his parents and having independent means to live upon, wants to settle down in the marriage state, the first thing he does is to look for a good, trustworthy go-between—as a rule they do not take a relation, but a friend or any person who is a good spokesman. To this man he explains his idea of his future wife, and he generally tells him that she should be active, good-tempered, able and willing to look after the management of the house in general. It seldom happens that he speaks about beauty or love. After he has explained the desire of his heart he asks his middle-man to look for such a wife and to let him know the result, at the same time promising him a present (generally in hard cash) if he fulfills his duty properly.

This middle-man now goes round looking and inquiring where such a wife could be got ; and when he thinks he has found one, he speaks with her parents but does not reveal by whom he has been sent or for whom the daughter might be destined. Everything is kept quiet until the young man has approved of the choice of his go-between. It sometimes happens that the parents try to get a husband for their daughter and that the same go-between is asked to do the work ; in

this case he pockets a double reward for his labour.

In case the young man is not independent, but is living with his parents, the parents arrange everything through a go-between but the opinion and the approval of the son is asked after the parents have made their choice. In case of a daughter however, her consent is never asked: her parents simply tell her that she has to marry this or that person.

Although, the middle-man is the chief person in this transaction, it often happens that the young man tries to catch a secret look at his future wife before he consents to the engagement.

Courtship in the real sense of the word is unknown among the poorer classes of Chinese. Their idea of marrying is to get a son to honour his soul after death and to save the money while his wife does the work of a coolie without pay.

When the young man agrees to the choice of the middle-man, this go-between goes to the parents of the girl to arrange the engagement, and the *bryan* (money to buy the girl) has to be settled.

Again, as Chinamen are business people, it often happens that bargaining ensues between the two parties. Promises also have to be made as to what extra things have to be sent to the parents of the girl for the feast on the eve of the marriage. Occasionally also the mother first wants to see the future husband of her daughter before any arrangements are made.

#### THE ENGAGEMENT.

When the day for the engagement has been agreed upon, the young man sends to the parents of the girl a silver bracelet, some fowls, arrack and mostly sweets to prepare a small feast for the relations of the girl only, to make known that her daughter has been engaged. The future husband is not invited, but the middle-man must be present; he occupies the place of honour at the table and plenty of drinks (arrack etc.) are given to him.

On the day of this dinner the parents of the girl send to her future husband a red coloured paper on which is written the day and hour of her birth.

her name and that she is now engaged to the one to whom she sends this paper. The bridegroom also returns a similar paper.

It depends entirely on the young man how long the engagement is to last. It is altogether against Chinese etiquette that those who are engaged should try to speak or look at one another before they are married; they should behave just as if nothing had happened.

It often happens among the poorest classes of Chinese that the parents buy a young girl from another poor family, with the intention of marrying this girl later on to one of their sons. When the girl is bought she is accepted by the new family as one of the daughters and the young boy for whom she is destined, treats her as a sister; and when both are old enough—about the age of 15—they marry together. It is however not obligatory for the boy to marry this girl and in case the boy should decline to take her as his wife, she is sold to any person who wants to marry her.

#### THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

When the young man has sufficient money and feels inclined to settle down, the books are consulted for a lucky day and a lucky hour to celebrate this great event. The result of this oracle is made known to both sides, after which the parties concerned nearly always give their consent.

On the evening before the day of marriage, the girl makes a grand feast and the young man sends over: the dowry (*phin keem*), a pair of shoes for all the near male relations of the girl, sarongs for the female relations, fowls or pigs, fans, onions, paddy, and sweetmeats for the dinner. The parents of the girl invite all their own relations and friends and also the go-between, but not the bridegroom. The invitations are sent round on a red paper, on which is written the date of the eve of the marriage feast and the names of the couple (very much the same as is done in Europe). The guests are supposed to make a present to the parents of the girl consisting of a sarong or a coat or money (one dollar and one cent). During the whole feast the



bride is not to be seen, and after the dinner gambling takes place until the early hours of the morning.

On the next day—the real day of the marriage—the bridegroom invites his relations and friends and also his bride—the parents of the girl however may not put in an appearance—. The guests are now supposed to bring with them a present, consisting of two long red papers on which, with black or golden characters, are written some words of luck or a blessing to the newly married couple, and which serve as wall decorations: or again money (one dollar and one cent).

At the appointed hour, the bride starts for the house of the bridegroom, but before starting her brothers and sisters eat for the last time with her some cooked rice out of the same bowl and after having partaken of this scanty meal, she is dressed up in all her finery. When on the point of leaving the house all her elder brothers and her sisters and also the parents are called together, while she has to make a deep bow before every one of them. This over, all begin to show their sorrow that a daughter or sister is leaving them for good.

In front goes a boy pulling a branch of a tree over the road that the bride should walk over a clean path. Behind this boy, two other boys carry a new box in which is put the clothing of the girl and on the box are bound: two pillows, one looking-glass, one comb, a siah box for betel-nut, etc., a small curtain to hang in front of the bed-room and a couple of chickens (which may not be killed) in a cage. All these articles are tied between two sticks to carry them easier. Behind this box the bride walks, dressed in her new attire and holding a fan before her face, accompanied by three women, one on each side of her, to lead her on the road and one behind her holding an umbrella.

The bridegroom now sends three other women to meet this procession on the road at a certain distance from his house. When they meet, the three women sent by the bridegroom, take the place of the three who accompanied her so far, while these now take their place at the rear.

As soon as the bride arrives at the house of the bridegroom, crackers are fired, and he receives her at the door

with a stately bow while she returns the bow in the same way. Both now go to the sitting-room in which is prepared the "topekong" (house-altar), where they pray for a short time before the house-god and eat together some cakes which have been first offered to the spirits. This finished, the bridegroom and bride (who are now husband and wife) go to the bed-room; all the relations of the bridegroom are called together while the bride genuflects before her father and mother in-law. The parents of the bridegroom now make a present of a ring (sometimes money) and the other relations give money while the bride presents them with tea. The small tea-cups are carried on a tray by the bride herself, but as she must keep the fan always before her face, one of the women does that for her, while another woman goes round with her telling her to what new relation she is offering the tea. While the relations take the tea and put the present (money wrapped in red paper) on the tray, they generally say some kindly words to her. After these ceremonies are over, the dinner is served at which the bride is not allowed to be present and this is as usual followed by gambling.

Three days after, the mother of the bride sends some cocoanut oil and fowls,—which are carried by the younger brother of the bride,—to the bridegroom in order to prepare a small dinner and invite a few people. After this, the new couple visit the parents of the bride, while another small dinner is given by her parents, and on this occasion the bridegroom has to genuflect before his father and mother-in-law as it is the first time he enters the house as their son-in-law.

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**The Prohibition of Deer's flesh among some of the Land-Dayaks.**

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The following notes do not pretend to be the result of any searching inquiry, but rather their object is to suggest a very interesting line of inquiry to anyone who